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IMPLEMENTATION OF EDUCATION LAWS IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

In this study the researcher examined Implementation of Education Laws in the Administration of Public secondary schools in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Two specific objectives with two corresponding research questions and null hypotheses guided the study. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of this study was 4146 secondary school teachers in the 226 public secondary schools in Ebonyi State while the sample was 377 teachers which comprised 216 male and 161female teachers. Structured questionnaire titled Questionnaire on the Implementation of Education Laws in the Administration of Public secondary schools (QIELASS) was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by three experts, one in Measurement and Evaluation option of Science Education Department and two experts in Educational Administration and Planning option of Educational Foundations Department of Ebonyi State University. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha technique which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.80. Data collected were analyzed using statistical Mean and Standard Deviation while t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings from the data analysis showed that: enforcement of free education in the administration of public secondary schools in Ebonyi State was to a high extent and that students' fundamental human rights as contained in the 1999 constitution of the FRN as amended are enforced to high extent in the administration of public secondary schools. The results of the hypotheses revealed that there were no significant differences between the mean ratings of male and female teachers on the extent to which free education and students' fundamental rights in the administration of public secondary schools in Ebonyi State. Based on the findings, the researcher recommended that Government of Ebonyi State should promote awareness campaigns by developing initiatives to educate parents and the community about the importance of free education and also organize workshops for staff to understand and promote students' rights. The implication of the study implies that, through effective implementation of education laws in the administration of public secondary schools, there are records of development in the school system but when these are neglected students are bound to suffer academically.

Keywords: Implementation, Education Laws, Administration, Public Secondary Schools, Free Education, Fundamental Rights

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Introduction

Education, be it formal, informal or non-formal has always served as an avenue through which values, skills, attitudes and belief system required for continued existence of the society as well as mankind are acquired, sustained, modified and eventually transferred from one generation to another (Igwe, 2019).

The principal co-ordinates and ensures that the various processes of administrative activities and services are carried out in the school within established rules and regulations so as to ensure a comprehensive development of the students in a given school. Administration is the ability to make people, activities and things function so that objectives are achieved. Administration involves directing and controlling the affairs of an organization. Administration as the process of controlling and directing life in a social organization can be deduced from the definition of Ume (2022) that within an organization, the administration is the position of a controller whose work is to direct activities of others towards the achievement of stated goals. In administration process, school principals perform a crucial task in order to actualize education goals. Principals as leaders, have the key for achieving sustainable education reforms like accountability, standard, test, enhancing legal rights of students, site-based management, school climate and turning schools into professional learning communities (Fullan, 2018).

Unfortunately, it appears that many challenges facing public secondary schools today are traceable to principals, who as chief executives are expected to be in total control of all aspects of school administration (Babson, 2022). These challenges include the ability of principals: to keep students motivated and safe in an increased apathetic and violent school environment; to administer quality education to all students including those with special needs; to keep abreast of new development and implement modern reforms as a result of technologies. All these point to the fact that something may not be well in terms of implementing education laws at the school level. Kalu (2017) noted that many principals have abdicated their administrative roles in the areas of implementing education laws.

However, implementation in this context implies the process of carrying out objectives or a plan. It is the process of performing a task, an activity or programme. Eimuhi (2021) described implementation as the stage where the preparations made earlier, the plans, designs and analysis proposed are tested to see what they really are. So, effective implementation of education law in the actualization of educational objectives account for effective administration in the school system for enhancing students' academic performance. For the secondary school programme to be successful there is need to apply education law and application of education law needs to be given serious

consideration for effective implementation of national policy and programme on public secondary schools.

Law according to Babson, (2022) is a rule of civil conduct, commanding what is right and prohibiting what is wrong. These undoubtedly should be why teachers' training programmes in most developing countries like Nigeria, should offer training courses on legal aspects of school operations to their students. Such courses are intended to equip the students (teacher trainees) with some basic knowledge of the law which enables them to be conscious of the legal implications of their actions, inactions and decisions.

Education laws are meant for the protection of the human rights of staff and students in a school setting. Education law encompasses the legal principles and policies that govern the operation, administration, and regulation of educational institutions, ensuring that students' rights and interests are protected and that quality education is provided (Igwe, 2022). To Babson (2022) education law is referred to as the body of laws, regulations, and legal precedents that govern the educational system, covering areas such as school governance, funding, curriculum, students' rights, teacher qualifications, and accountability. Education law are rules and regulation set for protecting, guiding, coordinating and controlling of human in the school setting.

Some of the laws that affect stakeholders in schools can be said to be education laws, which include Child Rights Act 2003, Examination Malpractices Act 1999, students' fundamental rights, chapter 4, constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004 (Ulumabe, 2019). But in context of this study, law of Equal Access (Free and Compulsory Education, UBE Act of 2004), Fundamental Human Rights (1999 Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria), Safety Laws (1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended), Parental Laws (PTA Statutory Laws as Enacted by Assessment Act 2004) and School Governance Laws National Policy of Education (FRN, 2013) as amended will be investigated.

Law of equal access which is in National Policy on Education (NPE), this document, first introduced in 1977 and revised several times (most recently in 2013), outlines the framework for education development in Nigeria. It emphasizes the need for universal access to education (free education), the importance of basic education, and the roles of Federal, state, and local governments in education development. Free and compulsory education for every child in Nigeria from the ages of 6 to 15 years. It aims to ensure that all children, regardless of their background, have access to quality basic education. Access to education in public secondary schools encompasses the fundamental principle that every student, regardless of their background, should have the opportunity to pursue further learning and

personal development. The extent of the implementation of law to access education in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State is a critical issue that directly impacts the nation's development and the future prospects of its youth (Udoka, 2022). Ebonyi State also adhered to laws of free and compulsory education but despite progress made over the years, access to secondary education in Nigeria remains limited, particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas because of low policies implementation (Ozochi, 2020). Factors such as inadequate infrastructure, inadequate qualified teachers, and financial constraints contribute to low enrollment rates and high dropout rates. This situation disproportionately affects vulnerable groups, including girls, children from low-income families, and those living in conflict-affected regions.

Fundamental rights are generally regarded as set of legal protections in the context of legal systems, wherein such system itself is said to be based upon this same set of basic, fundamental or inalienable “rights.” Such rights thus belong without presumption or cost of privilege to all human beings under such jurisdiction (Arop, 2019). The concept of human right has been promoted as a legal concept in large part owing to the idea that human beings have “fundamental” rights, that transcend all jurisdictions, but are typically reinforced in different ways and with different emphasis within different legal systems. In addition, Ukegbu, Adebayo, Uche and Anayeoha (2012) observed that fundamental human rights are the basic natural rights which are essential for human existence and every citizen is entitled to them and is expected to enjoy them in full without hindrance or discrimination. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014) in her constitution highlighted the following as the Fundamental Rights of human being (students): Right to life, Right to Dignity of human person, Right to Personal Liberty, Right to Fair Hearing, Right to private Life, Right to association and Right to peaceful assembly (p;18).

School principals are the administrative leaders of educational institutions, specifically responsible for overseeing the operations of schools. Their roles encompass a wide range of responsibilities, including managing staff, implementing educational policies, ensuring adherence to laws and regulations, and fostering a positive school environment conducive to learning (Alsalmi, 2018). Principals serve as the primary link between the school's stakeholders, such as teachers, students, parents, and the wider community. They play a critical role in setting academic standards, developing curricula, and driving initiatives for school improvement (Akuchie, 2020). In addition, that supports teacher development, engages with families, and promotes a culture of accountability and high expectations among both staff and students. Gender refers to the idea that educational systems do offer the same and equal type of opportunities for upward mobility to both sexes. Thus, gender is the state of being sensitive to the needs of

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both sexes. In the context of secondary schools, male and female teachers play a vital role in the educational process, contributing to the diversity and inclusivity of the learning environment. Both male and female educators bring unique perspectives and experiences that can enrich the educational experience for students (Ayeni, 2016).

In Ebonyi State the extent to which school implement education laws promote gender equity among boys and girls are to be considered. This becomes necessary as many parents often complain of punishment on their children without justification. Despite the various provisions for the protection of human rights generally, the question is, do secondary school principals actually make efforts towards implementing these rights? If the answer is presumably in the affirmative, the researcher is interested in investigating the extent of implementation of education laws in the administration of public secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

Statement of the Problem

In Ebonyi state and Nigeria at large, most teachers even school principals are not aware of their rights, let alone those of others (Nwankwo, 2016). Similarly, many are ignorant of the rules and regulations governing their employment and the school system in which they work. Some do not even know the rules and regulation guiding the school system and this has led to a great down fall of the school system. For example, a case between school principal of Government Secondary Afikpo and the School Management Board in 2005 which anchored on violation of students' rights and promotion of examination malpractice in the school environment, of which the school principal pleaded not to be aware of the rules and regulation but at last, the school principal was demoted. Some teachers in school system are not afraid of the school authorities because of negligence of the school authorities to administer punishment to the defaulters and this has greatly affected teachers' commitment in the school system leading to none coverage of the curriculum and the resultant effect poor performance of students in the school. This situation was earlier vividly illustrated by Nwagwu in Akinpelu (2018) who observed that some teachers in the school system have never read the Nigerian constitution nor even the laws, rules and regulations governing the administration of the school system. Many are not aware of their rights, duties, obligations and responsibilities under the law and more especially on the probable consequences or implications of their actions in their day- to-day activities within the school systems.

In other to effectively operate educational system in the state, there are laws that are being enacted to govern the activities of school organization. Informed principals, with knowledge about education law, understand that the discharge of their duties is guided by the rules and regulations governing their schools. Consequently, litigation becomes inevitable where rules and decision made by school authorities infringe on students' and staff's rights. It is against

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this background, that this study was design to investigate the extent of implementation of education laws in the administration of public secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

Purpose of Study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the extent of implementation of education laws in the administration of public secondary schools in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Ascertain the extent to which free education are being enforce in the administration of public secondary schools in Ebonyi State
2. Determine the extent to which students' fundamental rights as contained in the 1999 constitution of the FRN as amended are enforce in the administration of public secondary schools in Ebonyi State

Research Questions

The following research questions have been posed to guide the study:

1. To what extent are free education being enforce in the administration of public secondary schools in Ebonyi State?
2. To what extent are students' fundamental rights as contained in the 1999 constitution of the FRN as amended are enforce in the administration of public secondary schools in Ebonyi State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses guided the study;

1. There is no significant difference between the mean rating scores of male and female teachers on the extent to which free education are enforce in the administration of public secondary schools in Ebonyi State
2. There is no significant difference between the mean rating scores of male and female teachers on the extent to which students' fundamental rights as contained in the 1999 constitution of the FRN as amended are enforce in the administration of public secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

Methodology

The researcher adopted descriptive survey design. Descriptive survey research design according to Nworgu (2006) is a design approach which aims at collecting and describing data in a systematic manner, the characteristics feature or facts about a given population. Therefore, descriptive survey design was considered appropriate as the data collected from the appropriate respondents will be analysed without manipulation of any variables.

The area of the study was Ebonyi State. The State has 13 Local Government Areas (LGA). Ebonyi state is divided into three (3) Education Zones which include: Abakaliki, Afikpo and Onueke Education Zones. Ebonyi

State shares geographical boundaries with Benue State in the North, Abia State in the south, Cross River state in the East; and Enugu State in the West. The people of Ebonyi State are mainly farmers with a good number of traders and civil servants. The people of the state are mainly Igbos by their cultural background and other Nigerians. There are many public secondary schools in the State. The choice of the state for the study is based on the researcher's interest and various complaints of students and teachers on violation of education of laws. The population of this study was 4,146 secondary school teachers in the226 public secondary schools in Ebonyi State according to statistical information obtained from the state's Secondary Education Board, (SEB, 2023/2024). The breakdown has it that 2374 are male teachers and 1772 female teachers. The sample for data collection comprised 377 respondents made up of male and female teachers using Taro Yamane formular, for finite population. Proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to draw the sample of male and female teachers in Ebonyi State.

The instrument for data collection was researcher's structured questionnaire titled "Extent of Implementation of Education Laws in the Administration of Public secondary schools Questionnaire (EIELAPSSQ). The questionnaire has two sections. Section A and B. Sections A is designed to elicit information about the personal data of the respondents. The questionnaire response option takes a four-point rating scale in the form of 4 – point rating scale, ranging from 'Very High Extent (4), High Extent (3), Low Extent (2) and very Low Extent (1). Respondents were expected to make judgments by ticking (√) the appropriate columns which expressed their opinions about the items. The instrument was face validated by three (3) experts: two from the Department of Educational Foundations (Educational Administration and Planning) and one from the Department of Science Education (Measurement and Evaluation); all from the Faculty of Education, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. The validated instrument was trial tested with thirty (30) students and teachers in Enugu State which is not part of the study area to ensure its reliability. These gave an overall reliability score of 0.982. Data collected were analyzed using mean, standard deviation with the aid of statistical package of SPSS. In taking decision for mean, range values were adopted. That is 1.00-1.49 for Very Low Extent (VLE), 1.50 – 2.49 for Low Extent (LE), 2.50 – 3.49 for High Extent (HE) and 3.50 -4. 00 for Very High Extent (VHE). In testing the hypotheses, t-test was used to test the entire null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is upheld when the p-value was greater than or equal to significant level of 0.05 (p-value ≥0.05). while null hypothesis was not upheld when the p-value was less than or equal to significant level of 0.05.

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Results

Research Question 1: To what extent are free education being enforce in the administration of public secondary schools in Ebonyi State?

Data for this research question were collected with item 1-6 of the instrument. The data were analyzed descriptively and summarized in table 4.1.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on the extent to which free education being enforce in the administration of public secondary schools N336

S/N	Items Statement	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
1	School principals ensure students with disabilities have equal opportunities to access secondary education	336	3.47	0.577	HE
2	School principals ensure that secondary education are affordable for all students	336	3.27	0.689	HE
3	School principals ensure that no student is denied access to education due to geographical location	336	3.15	0.663	HE
4	School principals ensures that all students have equal access to educational resources	336	2.69	0.793	HE
5	School principals provide necessary accommodations for students	336	3.33	0.797	HE
6	School principals ensure that students with learning difficulties are provided with such special needs without payment	336	3.18	0.665	HE
	Grand mean		**3.18**		**HE**

Keys: Very High Extent= HVE, High Extent =HE, Low Extent=LE, Very Low Extent=VLE

Table I showed that the respondents with a grand mean score of 3.18 agreed on items 1, 2 ,3 4, 5 and 6, to a high extent that: School principals ensure students with disabilities have equal opportunities to access secondary education, ensure that secondary education are affordable for all students, ensure that no student is denied access to education due to geographical location, provide necessary accommodations for students, ensure that no student is denied access to education due to geographical location and that school principals ensure that students with learning difficulties are provided with such special needs without payment. This is an indication, that free education being enforce to a high extent in the administration of public secondary schools with a grand mean score of 3.18

Research Question 2: To what extent are students' fundamental rights as contained in the 1999 constitution of the FRN as amended are enforce in the administration of public secondary schools in Ebonyi State?

Data for this research question were collected with item 7-18 of the instrument. The data were analyzed descriptively and summarized in table 4.2.

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Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on the extent to which students' fundamental rights as contained in the 1999 constitution of the FRN as amended are enforce in the administration of public secondary schools N336

S/No.	Items Statement	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
7	School principals encourage existence of peaceful association among secondary school students	336	3.28	0.67	HE
8	School principals implement students right to life	336	3.33	0.81	HE
9	Students are given room for fair hearing school environment	336	3.47	0.58	HE
10	School principals facilitate students right to personal liberty	336	3.40	0.55	HE
11	School principals promote students' dignity of human person	336	3.41	0.59	HE
12	School principals promote students right to movement in the school environment	336	3.08	0.82	HE
	Grand Mean		**3.32**		**HE**

Keys: Very High Extent= HVE, High Extent =HE, Low Extent=LE, Very Low Extent=VLE

Table 2 result showed that the respondents agreed on items 7,8,9,10,11 and 12 with a mean score of 3.28, 3.33, 3.47, 3.40. 3.41 and 3.08 this showed that the respondents to a high extent agreed that school principals ensured: School principals encourage existence of peaceful association among secondary school students, School principals implement students right to life, Students are given room for fair hearing school environment, School principals facilitate students right to personal liberty, School principals promote students' dignity of human person and school principals promote students right to movement in the school environment. Students' fundamental rights as contained in the 1999 constitution of the FRN as amended are enforce in the administration of public secondary schools with a grand mean score of 3.32.

Hypotheses

Ho_1: There is no significant difference between the mean rating scores of male and female teachers on the extent to which free education are enforce in the administration of public secondary schools in Ebonyi State

The extent to which free education are enforced in the administration of public secondary schools were separated across gender and subjected to test of significance differences using t-test statistical tool. Summary of results were shown on Tables 6.

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Table 6: t-test of difference in the mean responses of male and female teachers on the extent to which free education are enforce in the administration of public secondary schools in Ebonyi State

Items	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	T	P-Value	Decision
1.	Male Teachers	187	3.50	0.57	334	1.345	0.179	Not Significant
	Female Teachers	149	3.42	0.58				
2.	Male Teachers	187	3.27	0.66	334	0.121	0.904	Not Significant
	Female Teachers	149	3.28	0.71				
3.	Male Teachers	187	3.12	0.70	334	0.726	0.469	Not Significant
	Female Teachers	149	3.18	0.60				
4.	Male Teachers	187	2.67	0.79	334	0.447	0.655	Not Significant
	Female Teachers	149	2.71	0.79				
5.	Male Teachers	187	3.40	0.75	334	1.594	0.112	Not Significant
	Female Teachers	149	3.26	0.84				
6.	Male Teachers	187	3.16	0.69	334	0.743	0.458	Not Significant
	Female Teachers	149	3.21	0.63				

Result on Table 6 revealed that the position of male and female teachers on the extent to which free education are enforce in the administration of public secondary schools in Ebonyi State was not significant, as the entire items from 1 to 6 items P-value was greater than the Alpha value of 0.05. This means that the male and female teachers were of the same opinion, on the extent to which free education are enforced in the administration of public secondary schools.

Ho_2: There is no significant difference between the mean rating scores of male and female teachers on the extent to which students' fundamental rights as contained in the 1999 constitution of the FRN as amended are enforce in the administration of public secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

The extent to which students' fundamental rights as contained in the 1999 constitution of the FRN as amended are enforce in the administration of public secondary schools were separated across gender and subjected to test of significance differences using t-test statistical tool. Summary of results were shown on Tables 7.

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Table 7: t-test of difference in the mean responses of male and female teachers on the extent to which students' fundamental rights as contained in the 1999 constitution of the FRN as amended are enforce in the administration of public secondary schools

Items	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	t	P-Value	Decision
7	Male Teachers	187	3.28	0.64	334	0.093	0.926	Not Significant
	Female Teachers	149	3.28	0.70				
8	Male Teachers	187	3.26	0.87	334	1.794	0.074	Not Significant
	Female Teachers	149	3.42	0.73				
9	Male Teachers	187	3.50	0.58	334	1.322	0.187	Not Significant
	Female Teachers	149	3.42	0.59				
10	Male Teachers	187	3.40	0.56	334	0.137	0.891	Not Significant
	Female Teachers	149	3.40	0.54				
11	Male Teachers	187	3.40	0.60	334	0.637	0.524	Not Significant
	Female Teachers	149	3.44	0.58				
12	Male Teachers	187	3.01	0.83	334	1.609	0.109	Not Significant
	Female Teachers	149	3.16	0.80				

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork 2024 Significant @ $P < 0.05$

Result on Table 7 revealed that the position of male and female teachers on the extent to which students' fundamental rights as contained in the 1999 constitution of the FRN as amended are enforce in the administration of public secondary schools in Ebonyi State was not significant because the whole items from 7 to item 12 P-value was higher than alpha level 0.05 significant. This mean that both male and female teachers were of the same opinion on the extent to which students' fundamental rights as contained in the 1999 constitution of the FRN as amended are enforce in the administration of public secondary schools.

Discussion

Result of the study as presented in Table 1 showed that the respondents agreed that free education are being enforced to a high extent in the administration of public secondary schools. The responded to a high extent agreed that: school principals ensure students with disabilities have equal opportunities to access secondary education, school principals ensure that secondary education are affordable for all students, school principals ensure that no student is denied access to education due to geographical location, school principals ensures that all students have equal access to educational resources, school principals provide necessary accommodations for students and school principals ensure that students with learning difficulties are provided with such special needs**.** While the hypothesis revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean rating scores of male and female teachers on the extent to which free education

are enforce in the administration of public secondary schools in Ebonyi State

The result is in line with the findings of Rawls and Amartya (2021) who asserted that principals play a crucial role in ensuring that education is accessible to all students, reflecting their commitment to the right to free education as mandated by law. They actively monitor enrollment figures, promote awareness about educational rights, and develop inclusive policies that accommodate diverse learners need. By enforcing this law, principals help decrease barriers to education, such as financial constraints or discriminatory practices.

The result in Table 2 showed that the respondents to a high extent agreed that school principals ensured: School principals encourage existence of peaceful association among secondary school students, School principals implement students right to life, students are given room for fair hearing school environment, School principals facilitate students right to personal liberty, School principals promote students' dignity of human person and school principals promote students right to movement in the school environment. While the mean ratings of the respondents, male and female teachers on the extent to which students' fundamental rights as contained in the 1999 constitution of the FRN as amended are enforce in the administration of public secondary schools in Ebonyi State was not significantly different.

This finding is in agreement with Pandey, (2019) observed that students' rights on personnel management aim to ensure that students are treated with respect, dignity, and fairness within the educational setting. By upholding these rights, schools can create a positive and inclusive environment that supports students' academic and personal growth. Students have various rights when it comes to personnel management within educational institutions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings reveal the effectiveness of principals in their roles as educational leaders. The study shown a strong commitment from principals towards enforcing free education, demonstrating their pivotal role in ensuring that all students have access to educational opportunities. Furthermore, principals are notably proactive in upholding students' fundamental rights, reflecting a deep understanding of their responsibilities to foster an inclusive and equitable learning environment. Conversely, the enforcement of safety laws appears to be a significant area of concern, with principals demonstrating only a low extent of compliance. This highlights a critical gap that requires attention to ensure that student safety is prioritized within educational institutions. On a more note, principals exhibit a high level of engagement in enforcing parental laws, showcasing their recognition of the importance of family involvement in the educational process. Additionally, their adherence to school governance laws further

reinforces their commitment to maintaining structured able dedication to several key areas, particularly in promoting education and safeguarding rights, the apparent deficiency in safety law enforcement calls for targeted interventions. By addressing these areas, principals can enhance their leadership effectiveness and foster a more holistic and secure educational atmosphere for all students.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made based on the findings;

1. Government of Ebonyi State should continue to promote awareness campaigns relation to free education.
2. School principals should continue to promote students' rights to life, rights to fair hearing, right to personal liberty and right to dignity of human person.

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